

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AND HEALTH NAVIGATORS

Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado

Community Health Worker

Also referred to as lay health worker, community outreach worker, community health advisor, promotores or lay health advocate.

A community health worker is a lay member of the community who is trained in some way to deliver an intervention to community members in community settings. In Colorado, training is provided by community-based organizations deploying CHWs and the community college system. Typically, community health workers share ethnicity, language, socio-economic status and life experiences with the community members they serve. Historically, community health workers have worked primarily with vulnerable, underserved populations and are deployed by community-based organizations.

Examples of community health worker activities may include:

- Outreach to those eligible but not enrolled in health coverage and encourage them to apply,
- Delivering culturally appropriate health information and education,
- Encouraging residents to participate in health screening and administering basic screening instruments,
- Advocating for community health needs.

In 2009, the Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics created a distinct occupation code for community health workers.

Health Navigator

Also referred to as lay navigator, unlicensed navigator, patient navigator (PN) or resource navigator. A health navigator assists individuals in reducing and eliminating barriers to healthcare access and in negotiating complex health delivery systems. In Colorado training programs are available to prepare health navigators for this role, ranging from community college certificate programs, on-line trainings and university offerings. Typically, health navigators are employed by healthcare systems including primary care, specialty care and managed care as well as local public health agencies.

Examples of health navigator activities may include:

- Assessing credible community resources, developing partnerships and making referrals for the patient population served,
- Care coordination,
- Connecting patients with resources,
- Working with patients that have high system utilization to access care appropriately,
- Supporting and motivating health behavior change,
- Implementing population health strategies.

Health navigators are a new occupation developed as a part of the transformation of care, responsive to patient and system needs. In 2014, a separate, standard occupation code was requested for patient navigators which is pending.

Sources:

Patient Navigator Outreach and Chronic Disease Prevention Act, 2005

Patient Navigator Research Program, National Cancer Institute, 2005-2010

CHW evidence-based Models toolbox, HRSA, 2011

Review of lay health workers in primary and community health care for MCH and management of infectious diseases, Cochrane Collaboration, 2010,

Community Health Worker National Workforce Study, HRSA, 2007

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